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ABSTRACT

The Computer Academy at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo) is a series of intensive, one-credit-hour workshops to assist professionals in increasing their level of computer competence. At the time they were initiated, in 1985, the workshops targeted elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators, were offered on Apple IIe microcomputers, and focused on specific software. Following the success of these workshops, the program was gradually expanded to include workshops on the IBM compatible and Macintosh microcomputers. The Computer Academy is a joint project of the College of Education, Project EXCITE, a campus-wide program to expand university community computer competence, and the Division of Continuing Education. Classes are held in campus microcomputer laboratories or at a regional center. In summer, courses meet for 2.5 consecutive days; during the academic year, they meet on 2 consecutive weekends. One Hundred forty-four workshops have been offered on 38 topics, training over 800 professionals. Although PROJECT EXCITE no longer involved, the other two partners continue to offer the highly successful program. Course topics are expanded frequently to meet student needs. (Author/MSE)

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Computer Academy

Western Michigan University
Summer 1985-Present

Model Programs Inventory Project
Submitted to AASCU
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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

Abstract

The Computer Academy is a series of intensive one-credit hour workshops designed to assist professionals in increasing their level of computer competency. Initiated in the summer of 1985, the Computer Academy workshops were offered at that time for elementary and secondary teachers and administrators. Workshops were offered on the Apple IIe microcomputers and focused on specific software. Following the success of the workshops on the Apple IIe, the program was gradually expanded to include workshops on the IBM compatible and Macintosh microcomputers.

The Computer Academy emerged as a joint project of the College of Education, Project EXCITE (a campus wide program to expand the University's faculty, staff and students' competency with computers), and the Division of Continuing Education at Western Michigan University. All classes for the Computer Academy are held in various microcomputer laboratories on the campus of Western Michigan University or at one of the regional centers. During the summer, courses meet for two and a half consecutive days. During the school year, courses are held on two consecutive weekends from 6:00-9:00 p.m. Friday evening (the first weekend only) and from 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Academic credit is awarded through the Department of Education and Professional Development.

To date, 144 workshop sessions have been offered on 38 different topics. Although Project EXCITE is no longer a participant in the program, the College of Education and the Division of Continuing Education continue to offer this very successful program. Course topics are expanded frequently to meet student needs.

Background

Since its initiation in the Summer of 1985, the Computer Academy has trained over 800 professionals in the use of microcomputers. The workshops are ideal for professionals interested in increasing their level of computer competency, for teachers who want to integrate computers into their classroom instruction and improve their personal and professional uses of the microcomputer, for persons responsible for coordinating computer activities in a work setting, as well as for the beginning computer user.

The Computer Academy was initially designed to assist elementary and secondary teachers and administrators to increase their level of computer competency through participation in a series of intensive one-credit workshops focusing on software applications. The initial objectives of the program were to:

1. increase educators' ability to use the computer as a teaching tool,
2. increase teachers' competency with the computer for their own personal and professional development,
3. provide an opportunity for educators to use, evaluate and select software for their own or their schools' use, and
4. provide academic credit in a nontraditional format convenient for working educators.

In the academic year 1985-86, the Computer Academy won the G. Theodore Mitau Award for Innovation and Change in Education. This was the year that computers were designated as the second most important issue facing Michigan educators, following classroom discipline in rank. The Computer Academy innovation evolved out of non-credit classes taught and organized by Howard Poole, Director of the Office of Instructional Development at Western Michigan University. Since these classes were offered to and taken mainly by teachers, the College of Education also became involved as the unit providing academic sponsorship and laboratory space.

Description

At the time of the Computer Academy's inception, a number of training opportunities had been developed state wide to assist educators with computer competency. Many of these training programs had been developed through the intermediate school districts as non-credit in-service programs. Credit courses had been offered, and still are offered, through area educational institutions, but almost without exception these courses are offered in a regular class format, meeting once a week for several months and often were focused on computer programming instead of applications. For all these reasons, the Computer Academy was designed to provide up to six hours of academic credit (both undergraduate and graduate) per semester through a series of one credit hour workshops, offered in a flexible format convenient for the working education professional interested in computer applications.

At the start of the Computer Academy, each one credit course was designed around a particular software package and its use in the classroom or in educational administration. Classes were limited (and still are) to 10-17 students (depending on laboratory size) so that all students have access to their own individual computer for the entire course. Software was chosen for its function, availability, ease of use, and compatibility with available hardware.

All classes for the Computer Academy are held in various computer laboratories on the campus of Western Michigan University or at one of the University's regional centers. Frequently laboratory space in a local high school is used during the summer. During the summer most classes meet from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. for 2.5 consecutive days. During the school year, courses are held on two consecutive weekends from 6:00-9:00 p.m. Friday evening (the first weekend only) and from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Saturdays. Overnight accommodations and food service are available on campus for those who travel some distance.

The Computer Academy program emerged as a joint project of the College of Education, Project EXCITE (a campus wide program to expand the University's faculty, staff and students' competency with computers), and the Division of Continuing Education. The College of Education was to provide academic sponsorship and faculty expertise. Project EXCITE provided equipment, software, and faculty, and the Division of Continuing Education administered the program which included marketing, registering students, budgeting and program planning.

All Computer Academy courses are offered for one hour of undergraduate or graduate credit. Current tuition rates are: $99.25/graduate credit hour and $80.25/undergraduate credit hour. In addition, each student is charged a $30.00 materials fee for each workshop. Tuition and fees are used to cover the expenses of the course including: faculty stipend, laboratory rental, software, disks and additional materials.

Instructors for Computer Academy courses are drawn from Western Michigan University faculty and staff with interest and expertise in a particular microcomputer application. In addition, some instructors are local teachers with expertise in using microcomputers. All instructors must be approved by the Department of Education and Professional Development and The Graduate College. Under normal conditions, a Master's Degree is required to gain approval by The Graduate College. To date, twenty-eight instructors have taught Computer Academy classes.

Results

The Computer Academy provides a unique opportunity for educators in Michigan and those in surrounding states. Although computer training programs exist at other colleges and universities in the state, this program is possibly the only one which combines a nontraditional format with academic credit while focusing on software applications. Many participants from throughout the state travel well over 100 miles (each way) to attend the program, which speaks to its unique role in meeting the computer training needs of

individuals in southwestern Michigan. Those who have participated in the workshops have indicated that while they have learned much about educational software and the computer as a teaching tool, the training has provided a significant contribution to their own personal productivity. At another level, the program has met enthusiastic response from microcomputer training experts at both the state and intermediate school district levels.

Currently, students who take Computer Academy classes are generally from the following populations: i) teachers from surrounding Michigan schools, some come from further afield; ii) private business individuals; iii) community individuals, for example a librarian; and iv) Western Michigan University faculty and staff. These facts indicate that since the Computer Academy's start in August 1985, the area of service has widened considerably to incorporate all interested individuals, and not necessarily teachers. To date, 144 workshops have been offered on 38 different microcomputer topics.

During June 1989, a complete report and evaluation of the Computer Academy was conducted by Dr. J. William Armstrong, Education and Professional Development and Marianne Vakalis, Computer Science. Their report is currently being reviewed by the Educational Technology Committee of the College of Education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Computer Academy program has been very successful in meeting the needs of teachers and educators, private business individuals, the community at large and University faculty and staff. The format used for Computer Academy workshops has proven useful in meeting the needs of working professionals seeking computer training in a short time frame. This format could be replicated for other course offerings in specific technical skill areas such as in the use of audiovisual equipment.

New program objectives for the future might include:

1. to encourage more WMU faculty to develop and teach Computer Academy courses,
2. to expand course offerings to include a wider range of applications;
3. to develop a certificate component to the program; and
4. to develop a summer institute to complement the summer Computer Academy offerings.

Although the initial investment of equipment and software is quite large, other colleges and universities are encouraged to replicate this program.

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